



Center for
Educator Compensation Reform
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
AND COMMUNICATION

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The primary purpose of CECR is to support the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees with their implementation efforts through the provision of ongoing technical assistance and the development and dissemination of timely resources. CECR also is charged with raising national awareness of alternative and effective strategies for educator compensation through a newsletter, a Web-based clearinghouse, and other outreach activities.

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STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

The primary audience for this article is the range of school and district officials who will be at the center of the development and implementation of a new educator compensation plan. These include teachers and, where appropriate, their union or association representatives, principals, central office administrators, superintendents, school board members, and, in some cases, members of the wider interested community.

Engaging and communicating with stakeholders is essential to the smooth and successful implementation of a new compensation plan. Key groups' participation and acceptance are imperative in developing a system that is accepted and supported by the larger community and sustained within the school environment.

No matter how carefully considered, how painstakingly designed and implemented, a new pay plan for teachers can be controversial and fraught with tension. There simply is no way to totally avoid the angst and uncertainty that is attendant to this work. Change is often difficult and unsettling, especially changes in something as sensitive as employees' salary mechanisms, and is bound to produce questions and concerns. Recognizing this at the start is a crucial first step, then planning to address these concerns from the outset is paramount. This article will help you recognize strategies that can minimize the expected anxiety and help smooth the way for a successful alternative compensation arrangement.

The steps described here offer a range of strategies for those who are preparing to engage in an alternative compensation effort. Throughout this piece, the suggestions for the step-by-step development of a new teacher compensation arrangement are based on the experiences of districts and states that have developed and implemented their own.

For purposes of the following illustrations and explanations, we assume that the alternative compensation plan is being developed and implemented at the district level and is structured around teacher pay. If, in fact, the plan is being designed at a state level or is targeted to school administrators, appropriate alterations in what follows can be made.

Step 1 Assemble a Representative Compensation Committee

The first step in developing a new teacher compensation system is assembling a working committee or task force representative of the major stakeholders.

Developing a new teacher pay plan should be a cooperative undertaking, involving both school district officials and teachers, or, more likely, their representatives, whose salary will be affected by the new plan. The hard work at the beginning is building a coalition for success. Some districts have made the mistake of attempting to develop and implement new teacher compensation systems without the involvement of teachers. In other words, district officials, working alone, designed the program and then announced it to the teachers who would be affected by it. This is an approach that is nearly guaranteed to doom any compensation plan before it even gets off the ground, as witnessed, for example, by fierce opposition to previous district performance pay proposals in Los Angeles and New York City.¹ Governors, too, have made the mistake of announcing plans to create statewide performance pay plans in their State of the State addresses without first consulting union leaders, state boards of education, or even their chief state school officers.² When an issue such as employees' pay is being examined, representatives of those employees must be part of the conversation from the beginning.

To be sure, this approach—involving major stakeholders in the discussion—may at times be somewhat messy and rocky. But it is necessary and sometimes legally required. In states with collective bargaining, salaries (or any change to the salary structure) must be negotiated between the district and local teachers' union or association. Yet even in jurisdictions in which collective bargaining is not a statutory obligation, involving teachers in the design and implementation of their wage construct is a necessary precursor to teacher “buy-in” to the ultimate plan.

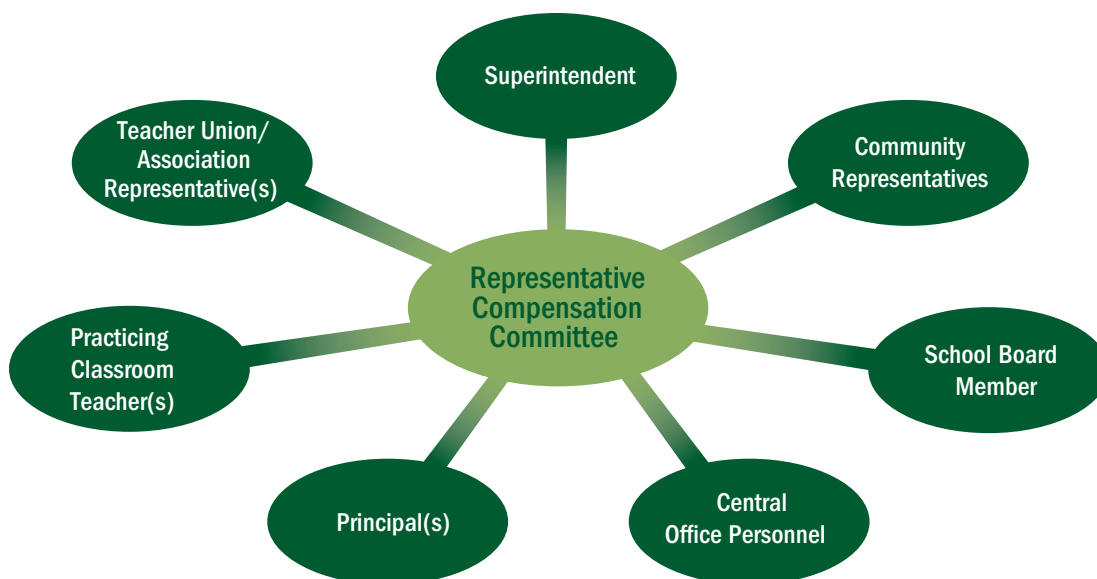
Developing a new teacher pay plan should be a cooperative undertaking, involving both school district officials and teachers whose salary will be affected by the new plan.

Creating a representative compensation reform committee—Who should be included?ⁱ

The superintendent — the presence of the district's chief executive officer sends to others on the committee and throughout the district the message that this issue is of considerable importance. Particularly at the beginning of the process, when the idea of alternative compensation is being tried out and tried on, the superintendent should be at the table.

Teacher union/association representative(s) – At least in the 37 states that require collective bargaining, salaries are a negotiable issue. (See pages 5 and 6 for more about the specifics of collective bargaining.) Even in locales in which collective bargaining is not legally required, there often is a teachers' union or association with which the district does business, formally or informally. One or more representatives of this organization should be part of the committee.

Additional teachers – Practicing classroom teachers should be part of the committee. Some (small) number of these teachers should either be appointed by the teachers' union or association, or agreed upon in a collaborative way by the district and union or association.



Principal(s) – Even if the pay plan is designed to affect only teacher pay, principals need a clear understanding of the plan's components and operation and some involvement in its design. Toward that end, the compensation committee should include at least one school principal.

Other central office personnel – Consideration should be given to other central administration personnel who might be included on the pay committee. If the superintendent intends to have a designee represent him or her at meetings following the initial one(s), that individual should be a member of the committee from the outset. In addition, consideration should be given to other district officials who might have information that would be useful to the development and implementation of the pay plan and, therefore, should be committee members. For example, it might make

sense to include the director of human resources, the chief budget officer, the administrator in charge of teacher professional development, and so on. As an alternative to including these individuals on the committee, of course, each can be brought in on an as-needed basis.

School board member — Including a member of the governing board on the compensation committee can be helpful. Board members will need to approve any new compensation arrangement, so the more a representative of this body understands the specifics and the discussions that led to the outline of the final plan, the better.

Other community representatives — Sometimes it is useful to include representatives of other kinds of organizations on the pay plan committee. Is there an active parents' organization whose support might be helpful? Does the community have a business organization whose representation, or skills, on the committee might be useful to securing wider support for the plan?

Establishing committee size and leadership

The size of the committee is a local decision and depends, in part, on local context and circumstances. The committee should be large enough to be appropriately representative of stakeholders and constituents and small enough to allow work to get done. As a rule of thumb, committees should generally be kept to 10-15 members so that conversations and a free exchange of ideas are possible.

The leadership of the compensation committee is symbolically important. Who then should be, at least nominally, "in charge" of the compensation work? If the pay committee is a joint labor-management undertaking, the committee might have co-chairs: one district representative and one teacher representative. This is the structure that was used to develop the alternative compensation systems in Denver, Toledo, Minneapolis, Columbus, and Douglas County, Colorado.

Alternatively, the committee might agree on a single chair, but that individual must be able to reflect the multiple views that are likely to emerge in the course of the compensation conversation.

Examples of Community Representatives Included on a Compensation Reform Committee

- A California district that is designing an alternative pay plan included a representative of an influential local business group that helps with fundraising efforts.
- Douglas County, Colorado, when designing its pay plan in 1994, included a human resources specialist from a local firm who was knowledgeable about compensation options.
- In Chattanooga, one of the business leaders the mayor appointed to help redesign compensation and attract accomplished teachers to the city's lowest performing schools was the executive editor of *The Chattanooga Times Free Press*.³

The role of collective bargaining

What should be the range and reach of the compensation committee's authority? Should the committee be authorized to make decisions about the new compensation plan, or just to make recommendations? If recommendations, to whom? Under certain circumstances, the role and authority of the compensation committee may depend on whether a state authorizes collective bargaining.

In states with collective bargaining, salaries are a negotiable item. Pay plans, their structure and amounts, are part of the contract developed jointly between the local school board and the teachers' organization that has been elected by teachers to negotiate their wages, hours, and terms and conditions of employment.

If the new pay plan is being designed for inclusion in an upcoming contract, the compensation committee might be authorized to develop a recommended plan and report its recommendations to the labor-management contract bargaining team. Denver's 2004 ProComp system, for example, is part of a nine-year collectively bargained pay agreement.

The school board, of course, must approve the compensation plan. They are legally obligated to do so.

In what form does teachers' acceptance come? If the pay plan is part of a comprehensive contract, teachers may be asked to vote on it as part of the contract package. This is the way Toledo's and Columbus' plans gained teacher approval, for example. Alternatively, the pay plan could be approved by teachers in a vote separate from a full contract, particularly if the plan is negotiated midway through an existing agreement. Denver and Minneapolis held special votes among teachers for the purpose of endorsing their new pay plans.

It is also possible, however, that the district and union or association will decide not to try to place the new pay program in the contract immediately. They might agree to allow the system to play itself out for a while, to provide opportunities to work out any "bugs" before it is cemented into a binding, long-term agreement. In this case, the district and teachers' organization might agree to place the details of the pay plan in a trust agreement or memorandum of understanding, both of which are labor-management agreements that sit outside the collectively bargained contract. While these arrangements carry the weight of being joint agreements, they also have the possible advantage of being able to be revised much more expeditiously than can a negotiated contract should the need arise. Under this circumstance, the district and union or association should jointly determine at what point a vote of teachers is advisable.

The composition of the committee should be sufficiently broad to cover the interests of those stakeholders who are directly involved in the outcome of a plan or can provide useful resources or support to help shape the plan.

The role and authority of a compensation committee when there is no collective bargaining

Some states (e.g., Georgia, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Virginia) prohibit collective bargaining. Nevertheless, it often is the case that, especially in large districts in some of these states, districts and teacher organizations, by virtue of tradition and past practice, engage in contract-like discussions that result in what effectively are labor-management agreements. Texas law, for example, while not allowing collective bargaining, requires “consultation” on many working condition matters between the district and any teachers’ organization with more than 500 members.

In a state that does not require (or even prohibits) collective bargaining, a compensation committee effectively has the authority allocated to it by the school board. The board could decide to empower the committee to make a decision about the compensation plan or could decide that the committee will report to the superintendent and school board for final disposition of the plan. Teachers may not be legally required to vote to approve a plan, but certainly some kind of vote or poll to gain a “sense of the teachers” is advisable.

Step 2 Plan Carefully

Perhaps the most important element in designing a new compensation structure is planning. Rushing headlong into a plan without giving careful thought to the necessary developmental efforts (e.g., what do we want to accomplish?, what kinds of data will we need and how will we acquire them?, which employees will the plan cover?) will jeopardize smooth implementation.

Beginning the conversation

Once the committee is in place, the obvious next step is for it to begin its work. Getting started may be a bit awkward, especially if all of those at the table do not know each other. The initial conversation may be smoothed by some sort of “ice breaker” as a way to encourage all committee members to participate. For example, two districts in California began their alternative compensation work with wide-ranging discussions of the benefits and disadvantages of their districts’ current compensation systems. These initial conversations (which lasted only an hour) provided a useful foundation both to air points of view and begin to see where perspectives meet and where they diverge.

Selecting the type of plan

Alternative compensation plans typically fall into one of two categories. Some plans focus exclusively on student achievement, while others “mix and match” various kinds of teacher pay incentives that are assessed on multiple measures. These may include pay for knowledge and skills, pay for position, pay for added professional responsibility, and pay for student learning results.

Significant initial steps in the work of the teacher compensation committee will be to select the type of plan to be implemented and second, to determine the kinds of indicators that will compose the pay plan. The elements of the pay plan should be determined, at least in part, by what it is the district hopes to accomplish with a new compensation structure.

Committee responsibilities

The compensation committee should be authorized to assume a number of important responsibilities.

- 1. Determining a timeline for the work** — At the outset, the compensation committee needs to determine how often meetings will be held, where the committee will meet (e.g., district office, union or association office, neutral location), and the time by which the committee hopes to have completed its work. Determining a deadline for completion of the work will help to keep the work on track.
- 2. Understanding pay-for-performance options and experiences** — Members of the pay committee need at least a working understanding of the experiences of other districts in establishing and implementing alternative teacher compensation plans, including the kinds of plans they selected, why they selected them, and the challenges to development and implementation. The committee need not conduct original research, but should rely on the increasingly more widely available reports and studies (including resources from the Center for Educator Compensation Reform, CECR) to gain the requisite understanding of today’s compensation landscape.
- 3. Agreeing on what the plan should aim to accomplish** — The committee must concentrate on what the district hopes to accomplish with a new compensation structure in order to design a new pay plan that meets the district’s needs. The elements of the pay plan and the district’s goals (e.g., recruiting and retaining teachers in high-need schools and subjects) should be aligned.

Step 3 Design the New Compensation Plan

What are the most important principles that the committee should consider?

The pay plan that ultimately is developed should, to the extent possible, embrace the following six important principles.

- 1. Rewards should be based on objective criteria** — Perhaps no criteria are totally objective, but, insofar as possible, awarding teacher incentive dollars should be as objective as possible, based on agreed-upon standards and measures. One of the chief criticisms of early “merit pay” plans was that rewards were largely determined by principals, leading to allegations of bias and favoritism. Newer plans, such as Denver’s ProComp system, have established explicit criteria that spell out how the plan will reward and recognize teachers:
 - who continue to develop and demonstrate skills and knowledge for their specific discipline;
 - who demonstrate proficient and distinguished practice through a professional evaluation;
 - whose students meet and exceed expectations for academic growth; and
 - who work in positions designated as difficult-to-fill or teach in schools designated as hard-to-serve.⁴
- 2. The plan should be understandable** — The plan, and all of its components, should be transparent. That means it should be understandable to all of the individuals who will be affected by it. As one leader of a teacher compensation committee noted, “Our mantra is, ‘no surprises’.” No one should be surprised about who qualifies for an incentive or what the amount is or the criteria on which it is based. One of the most valuable lessons learned when Houston distributed bonuses under its new performance-pay plan in January 2007 was that the district needed to develop a comprehensive communication plan so that all teachers understood how awards were determined. As the *Houston Chronicle* noted:

Teachers across the district, for example, didn’t understand how a nurse ended up receiving a bigger bonus than a math

Key Principles of an Alternative Compensation Plan

1. Base awards on objective criteria.
2. Create a clear, transparent system.
3. Rewards must be attainable.
4. Implementation is feasible.
5. Plan must be affordable for the district.
6. System is sustainable in the long term.

or science teacher. They didn't understand how a teacher earned no bonus even though 100 percent of her students passed the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills. And they didn't understand how an admired educator who had been named "Teacher of the Year" received zilch.

The explanation for all those queries is simple, according to the superintendent's team: the teachers didn't meet the requirements of the district's unique formula, which spits out who gets bonuses and who doesn't. But Superintendent Abelardo Saavedra had to concede that the formula is both complex and imperfect, and he and the school board [need] to tweak it.⁵

Nothing will erode teachers' faith in a pay system faster than some teachers being asked to return a bonus because the district made a calculation error.

- 3. Rewards should be attainable** — Teachers must believe that securing the bonuses or rewards is possible. They need to understand how to qualify for extra dollars, be assured they will be held harmless in terms of current salary (i.e., no one loses pay as a result of the new salary construct), and know that the possibility of earning additional money is not limited to a small, pre-determined number of teachers. In Cincinnati, for example, fear that salaries could decrease if veteran teachers received a low evaluation score is believed to have contributed to the downfall of the district's proposed performance-pay plan in 2002.⁶

In addition, once incentive dollars are awarded, teachers must be assured that those dollars will not be revoked because of a miscalculation on the district's part. Nothing will erode teachers' faith in a pay system faster than some teachers being asked to return a bonus because the district made a calculation error.

- 4. Implementation of the new plan must be feasible** — Before the district implements a new teacher pay plan, the school system must have or develop the capacity to manage the program. For example, necessary data systems must be in place. Depending on the plan, these might include up-to-date human resources systems and/or student tracking systems that enable the district to match teachers to individual students. In recent years several states have made critical changes to their own teacher data systems that make it easier for districts to develop performance-pay systems. In 2007, for example, Colorado enacted legislation to design a statewide teacher-identifier system that will allow the state to match student test scores to individual teachers, track teacher mobility, and evaluate the performance of teacher education program graduates.⁷

5. The pay plan must be affordable — An alternative teacher pay arrangement is unlikely to be cost-free. Thus, the compensation committee must ensure that the plan is affordable. Anticipating the long-term fiscal consequences of a new salary arrangement is an essential task, and a number of districts have been forced to abandon performance-pay plans that were too costly.

The committee must consider issues such as: What will be the level of added dollars for which teachers can qualify? How will those levels be determined? Will the money be paid in bonuses (which typically do not become part of the calculation for retirement) or become a permanent part of a teacher's salary?

6. The plan should be sustainable — The teacher pay plan must be able to be sustained. Nothing would be worse than committing to a new salary structure, only to have to abandon it a year or two later because the program's reach has exceeded the district's financial grasp. Thus, the compensation committee must determine if additional dollars, beyond what is currently spent to maintain the salary schedule, are required and, if so, where they will come from.

Other considerations for the committee's deliberations

Other considerations that should be part of the compensation committee's deliberations are shown here. These items are part of an overall weighty agenda for the compensation committee. The key will be having ongoing productive conversations that keep the work moving forward.

Q Will the plan be voluntary or mandatory?
What are the participation requirements?

A Minneapolis' plan is voluntary; Denver's is voluntary for teachers hired prior to January 2006; Texas' and Florida's plans are mandatory. Initially, Houston's plan was mandatory, but in response to criticism following the first round of teacher payouts, the district made it voluntary so that teachers could opt out if they chose to do so.⁸

Q Will the pay plan include only classroom teachers or will it include all non-administrative licensed personnel? If it is to include all “teachers,” broadly defined, and if student performance on standardized tests is part of the plan, how will the plan measure student progress for those employees whose students are not subject to standardized tests because they are in grades or subjects that are not tested?

A In Denver, for example, all “teachers,” which includes non-classroom teachers, counselors, psychologists, school nurses, and social workers, participate in the pay-for-student achievement portion of ProComp by setting their own measurable student learning goals. These goals must be approved by a supervising administrator and must include both expected growth levels and the ways in which growth will be measured.

Alaska’s statewide performance-pay plan also rewards all teachers and staff in schools that improve student achievement on state tests. Teachers and principals in the target schools can receive bonuses of up to \$5,500, while paraprofessionals and other non-certified staff in the schools can receive up to \$2,500.⁹

Q Will the plan be implemented at the same time for all grades, subjects, and schools that will be involved, or will it be phased in over some specified period?

A Guilford County, North Carolina, for example, began its targeted performance-pay program for mathematics and English language arts teachers in 20 of its highest poverty schools. The district expanded its Mission Possible Plan to seven additional schools during Phase II after receiving a Teacher Incentive Fund Grant from the U.S. Department of Education and will add two more high schools in 2007-2008 with additional support from Action Greensboro, a consortium of six local foundations.¹⁰

Having productive discussions

As was described at the beginning of this article, crafting a new teacher compensation system is bound to produce some tension-filled conversations. Not everyone on the committee is likely to be in agreement—on the reasons for developing such a plan, on the kind of plan that should be designed, perhaps even on data or fiscal needs. It will be essential for the committee to work through disputes in order to reach agreement on a plan. This requires that committee members respect differing points of view and try, as best they can, to view the work from other committee members' perspectives.

In part, this means accepting that there is no single model, no one right way to structure teacher compensation. Experiences of others that have gone before can provide guidance. But research cannot yet say definitively that one approach (e.g., using only test scores or using multiple measures, or, for that matter, which measures) produces superior results. Again, selecting the appropriate mix of salary incentives is dependent on determining what is to be accomplished and making a judgment about the best means to accomplish this.

Committee members must respect differing points of view and try to view the work from other perspectives.

When agreement doesn't seem possible

As previously suggested, rethinking teacher pay is bound to generate strong feelings. Either the district or the teachers, or both, may hold robust views about restructuring teacher compensation. As experience shows, these views may or may not be based on actual data. But strongly held, they are significant and must be addressed.

So what if an impasse is reached (or conversations never even get off the ground)? What, then? In instances such as these, it may be useful to bring in an outside, neutral third party facilitator to help the conversation move forward. The facilitator, ideally, should be someone who is trusted (or is able to gain the trust) of the principal players and is able to get the conversation moving again. It may simply be someone on whom the union and the district can agree who is quite knowledgeable about alternative compensation, or just someone with the skills to listen well, hear what everyone is saying, and help to find common ground.

Step 4 Build Support for the Work and the Plan

Among the most important tasks for the compensation committee is developing and implementing communication strategies. Keeping interested parties informed as to the work and its progress will be important to ensuring smoother implementation when that time comes.

Strategies to “spread the word” and build support and momentum for the plan

- 1. Written materials** — A set of clear, concise, but comprehensive written materials should be designed as early as possible. In some instances, it will make sense to tailor written materials for specific audiences—teachers, principals, parents and community members. At the beginning of the project, it may also be helpful to distribute a letter signed jointly by the superintendent and the union or association president explaining the work about to be undertaken. Thereafter, regular updates are key.

Denver developed a ProComp handbook that is available on-line and distributes a special ProComp newsletter to all district personnel.¹¹

- 2. Meetings** — School-based meetings are helpful to inform teachers and principals about the compensation work in an in-person format. One strategy that has been used (especially in small districts) is for the superintendent or some other high-level district official and a union or association official to conduct a “road show,” bringing the conversation and a question and answer period to schools so that teachers and principals have an opportunity to learn firsthand about the compensation work.

Denver holds “voluntary information” sessions after school in different parts of the city so that teachers can drop in at their convenience and ask any questions they might have about the pay system and how it will affect them personally.¹² Denver has also established a hot-line that teachers can call and an email address that they can use to submit written questions and requests.¹³

- 3. Electronic communication** — An electronic newsletter or a Web site dedicated to compensation is another way of ensuring widespread communication.

Denver, Minneapolis, and Guilford County are examples of districts that have developed extensive Web sites to explain how their alternative teacher pay systems work.¹⁴ Guilford County posts an electronic newsletter to its Web site each month.¹⁵ And Denver has developed an on-line video about ProComp and an on-line calculator that teachers can use to project their earnings under the ProComp system over the course of their teaching careers.¹⁶

All TIF grantees are strongly encouraged to develop a written communications plan outlining how they intend to communicate details of the new compensation plan to various stakeholders, the methods they will use, who will be responsible for developing and communicating information, and timelines for implementation. A sample communications plan that was developed by one TIF grantee, the South Carolina Department of Education, is included as a model.

Important lessons learned about effective communication strategies

Whatever form your communication takes, some basic rules should be your guide:

- 1. Choose language carefully** — The language used to describe the pay plan and its intent is important. For example, the term “merit pay” has an unfortunate recent history in education. The term itself, rightly or wrongly, raises red flags with teachers. Avoiding this term just makes sense. In addition to avoiding hot-button terms, it is important that the terms used be explained clearly. For example, if the proposed compensation plan uses a “value-added” calculation of test scores, this term and its application need to be adequately and accurately explained.
- 2. Give the plan a name and an identity** — Many districts have selected their own names for their pay programs. Naming the program provides it with a local identity and, often, a shorthand way of referring to it. Denver’s is called ProComp; Minneapolis’ is the Alternative Teacher Professional Pay System; Toledo’s plan is called TRACS (Toledo Review and Alternative Compensation System); Guilford County’s is called Mission Possible; and Columbus’ is the Performance Advancement System. Several states have also selected names for their statewide pay programs. Minnesota’s program is Q Comp (Quality Compensation for Teachers).

Building Support and Momentum

- Develop written materials; tailor the message for different audiences.
- Host meetings to spread the message and important details of the plan and to answer questions and address concerns of teachers.
- Use electronic communications to ensure widespread communication.

3. Anticipate the critics and skeptics — No matter how well planned, how clearly articulated, how thoughtfully described, there will be critics and skeptics of any new compensation system. One of the lessons from districts and states that have developed and implemented these systems is to anticipate the questions and criticisms and be ready with a response. Minneapolis made sure a group of well-informed teachers was ready at a moment's notice to answer teachers' questions and respond to critiques. Douglas County put a vocal teacher critic of the plan on the compensation committee (and eventually won him over).

4. Communicate with the media — Developing a good working relationship with the local media is critical. Teacher pay is bound to generate a newspaper story, and stakeholders will want the paper to write an accurate portrayal of the work. It may be useful to select a single district spokesperson, or a spokesperson each from the district and the teachers' union or association, to be the point persons for media contact. When the pay project begins, consider a meeting of district and union or association officials with the newspaper's editorial board and education writer(s) to explain the intent of the emerging work. Thereafter, periodic news releases (even if they do not result in a news story) can help to keep the press aware and informed.

By engaging the press early and often, districts and states may be able to ward off the type of negative headlines generated in North Carolina in 2005 when the state distributed performance bonuses to teachers in improving (but still very low-performing) schools. Under the state's ABC program, teachers whose students show one year of academic growth on state achievement tests are eligible for \$750 bonuses. If their students exceed the target, they are eligible for \$1,500 bonuses. However, it is possible for schools to meet or exceed growth targets and qualify for performance bonuses while still scoring at very low levels. This was the case in 37 North Carolina schools in 2005. Fewer than 60 percent of the students in each of the schools had passed state tests, but their gains had been large enough so that teachers qualified for \$3.2 million in state performance bonuses. Rather than focusing on the achievement gains that had been made, the headlines focused on rewards for low levels of attainment in "failing" schools.¹⁷

No matter how well planned, how clearly articulated, how thoughtfully described, there will be critics and skeptics of any new compensation system. Anticipate the questions and criticisms and be ready with a response.

Step 5**Develop a Feedback Loop to Make Midcourse Corrections**

Once a compensation plan has been agreed to by the major stakeholders, a process needs to be put in place to assess regularly the extent to which the plan is being successfully communicated and implemented. Focus groups and satisfaction surveys among teachers, and perhaps principals, are relatively easy and inexpensive ways to take the temperature of the new compensation plan.

It may be that periodic mid-course corrections are necessary in the early phases of implementation. Overwhelming demand for mid-course corrections to Florida's statewide performance-pay plan led the state legislature to essentially replace the original program in March 2007 so that it now gives local districts greater flexibility, relies less on state FCAT scores to determine teacher effectiveness, rewards a larger pool of teachers, and increases the maximum size of the bonuses that teachers can earn.¹⁸ A number of modifications to Houston's performance-pay program are also underway, based on lessons learned during the district's first payouts to teachers and principals. Changes include allowing teachers to opt out of the new pay plan; increasing the size of the bonuses that teachers of pre-kindergarten to Grade 2 can earn; basing high school teacher awards on departmental student gains, not just the gains of students in their individual classrooms; and moving to a value-added measurement system that bases teacher awards on more stable, multi-year patterns of student achievement gains.¹⁹

Tips for Effective Communications

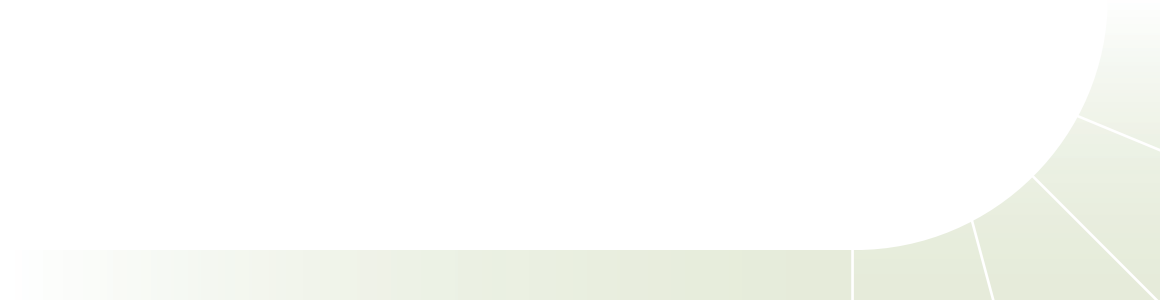
- Choose the language carefully, and define the key terms.
- Develop a name and identity for the compensation plan.
- Anticipate critics and skeptics; work to address these concerns in advance.
- Communicate with the media.

Step 6**Evaluate the Results**

Finally, the compensation committee should make plans early in the implementation to evaluate its impact and effects. The evaluation should be conducted by a neutral third party. Formative evaluation reports that examine the quality of program implementation and provide feedback for the purpose of making revisions are most useful for the first couple of years of the plan's implementation. Summative review to determine the overall impact of the program, including whatever outcome data can be derived, should wait until the plan has been in place at least two to three years.

Conclusion

The ideas and strategies presented here will help establish a strong foundation for engaging teachers and others in the development and implementation of new teacher compensation systems and communicating information about those systems to educators and the public. The ideas are derived largely from the experiences of districts and states that have paved the way. But it is important to emphasize here that reconceptualizing the way in which teachers are paid is just one prong of a more comprehensive strategy to improve the quality of teaching to improve levels of student learning. Taken together with other improvement strategies, new forms of teacher compensation have the prospect of providing powerful incentives to attract and retain high-quality teachers and encourage teachers to take on more challenging assignments. The success of these plans will be enhanced to the extent that teachers are involved from the very beginning.



South Carolina's Community Relations/Communication Plan

Goals of the Community Relations Plan:

The goals of the Community Relations Plan are as follows:

1. Establish a regular and timely communication process between the SCTAP (South Carolina Teacher Advancement Program) office and each participating school.
2. Raise the awareness of SCTAP among educators and non-educators (parents and community members) across the state.
3. Use positive publicity to increase funding.
4. Garner support for the program from statewide stakeholders.²⁰
5. Use media outlets effectively to promote SCTAP.

Action Plan:

An effective communication plan includes multiple vehicles and methods for delivering communications. The table below illustrates the type, audience, person responsible, and the timeframe.

Type	Audience	Person Responsible	Timeframe	Goal
Provide monthly newsletters to participating schools	Internal	Administrative Assistant	Monthly	1
Provide quarterly reports to USDE and private foundations	External	Project Director	Quarterly	3,4
Air SCTAP updates on SCETV (South Carolina Educational Television)	Internal and external	Project Director	Annually	2,3,4,5
Present SCTAP at various conferences around the state	External	Project Director/Program Specialist	Monthly	2
Present SCTAP at Rotary Clubs and other non-educational meetings	External	Project Director	Monthly	2
Sponsor SCTAP State Conference	External and internal	ALL SCTAP Staff	Annually	2,3,4

Type	Audience	Person Responsible	Timeframe	Goal
Establish positive relationships with journalists across the state who cover education	External	Program Specialist	Weekly	2,3,4,5
Create pamphlets for local libraries and conferences	External	Administrative Assistant	Annually	2
Provide current and interactive Web site	External and internal	Administrative Assistant	Weekly	1,2,5
Provide training and guidance to principals on media relations	External	Program Specialist	Annually	5
Hold “Legislators in Schools Day” to increase knowledge about SCTAP	External	Program Specialist	Annually	4,5
Train at least one career teacher from each school on calculating payouts	Internal	Project Director	Annually	4
Establish e-mail address (hotline) for questions	Internal External	Project Director	--	1,2,4
Hold after-school Q/A meeting at each participating school	Internal		Monthly	1,2
Conduct regional (town hall-type) meetings	External	Project Director	Monthly	2,4
Establish a focus group of stakeholders to expose concerns in the communication plan	External	Project Director	Annually	2,4,5

Evaluation:

Listed below are the goals of the SCTAP communication plan and the method for evaluating them. The goals of the Community Relations Plan are as follows:

1. Establish a regular and timely communication process between the SCTAP office and each participating school.
 - a. *Feedback forms will be provided to all school leadership personnel soliciting specific information on whether they perceive the communication is regular and timely. In addition, all SCTAP staff will complete a similar Likert-style survey about each participating school. The survey results will be aggregated for the SCTAP office and disaggregated for each participating school. Results from the surveys will be used to guide changes in communication policy.*
2. Raise the awareness of SCTAP among educators and non-educators across the state.
 - a. *In partnership with the Anderson Research Group, conduct a baseline (Y1) survey of educators and non-educators across SC via random sampling to rate the awareness of SCTAP. Administer the survey each subsequent year to note if the awareness levels are increasing.*
3. Use positive publicity to increase funding.
 - a. *Conduct annual budget reviews, and survey those involved (or their assistants/aides) with allocating money for SCTAP to determine their motivation.*
4. Garner support for the program from statewide stakeholders.
 - a. *Sponsor a SCTAP annual conference with a specific list of invitees; administer a Likert-style survey at the conference to gauge the support for the program. Compare the data longitudinally.*
5. Use media outlets effectively to promote SCTAP.
 - a. *Monitor the news outlets across the state, looking for a) the number of stories/pieces on SCTAP each year; and b) the percentage of positive, neutral, or negative stories/pieces. These data will be compared longitudinally.*

Annually, the data sources mentioned above will be analyzed, and the community relations plan will be changed accordingly. The Project Director will conduct the data analysis and meet with the team for input on appropriate changes.

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End Notes

- ⁱ If this is a state-level compensation plan, the state-level compensation committee should be structured much as the local one would be: with the state superintendent, one or more local superintendents, representatives of the state NEA and/or AFT (there may be both organizations in a state), and a member of the state board of education.
- ¹ See, for example, Sahagun, L. "Teachers protest merit pay proposal," *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 2000; Johnston, R. "Merit pay fight, politics alter N.Y.C. summer program," *Education Week*, April 19, 2000.
- ² See, for example, Borg, L. "Union leaders fault merit-pay proposal," *The Providence (RI) Journal*, January 25, 2005; DiMassa, C.M., & Rubin, J. "CA teachers unions blast governor's merit pay plan," *Los Angeles Times*, January 10, 2005.
- ³ City of Chattanooga. "Mayor Corker appoints Community Education Alliance." Press release, November 16, 2001.
- ⁴ Denver Public Schools. Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp). <http://denverprocomp.org/>
- ⁵ Mellon, E. "Teacher bonuses strike a nerve," *Houston Chronicle*, January 25, 2007.
- ⁶ See Keller, B. "Cincinnati teachers rebuff performance pay," *Education Week*, May 29, 2002; Delisio, E. "Pay for performance: What went wrong in Cincinnati?" *Education World*, January 28, 2003.
- ⁷ Brown, J. "Teacher-identifier system in works," *Denver Post*, April 12, 2007.
- ⁸ Radcliffe, J. "Houston teachers could opt out of new incentive pay plan," *Houston Chronicle*, August 23, 2007.
- ⁹ McNeil, M. "States giving performance pay by doling out bonuses," *Education Week*, September 6, 2006.
- ¹⁰ Silberman, T. "Extra pay might fill teaching jobs," *The (Raleigh, NC) News & Observer*, May 20, 2006; Guilford County Schools. "Friday Notes: Phase II Mission Possible school presentations completed," February 16, 2007; Guilford County Schools, University of North Carolina, and Action Greensboro. "Action Greensboro commits \$2 million to recruit and retain GCS math teachers." Press release, September 6, 2006; Guilford County Schools. "Mission Possible overview." http://www.gcsnc.com/mission_possible/background.htm
- ¹¹ Denver Public Schools, Professional Compensation for Teachers (ProComp). *ProComp at a glance: A quick reference handbook*. <http://www.dpsk12.org/manila/programs/denverprocomp/ProCompHandbook.pdf>
- ¹² Personal communication with Shirley Scott, Denver Public Schools, February 26, 2007.
- ¹³ Denver Public Schools. Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp). <http://denverprocomp.org/>
- ¹⁴ Denver Public Schools. Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp). <http://denverprocomp.org/>; Minneapolis Public Schools. "Welcome to the Alternative Teacher Professional Pay System (ATPPS)." <http://atpps.mpls.k12.mn.us/>; Guilford County Public Schools. "Mission Possible Overview." http://www.gcsnc.com/mission_possible/background.htm
- ¹⁵ See, for example, Guilford County Schools. *Mission Possible Monthly Newsletter*, September 2007. http://www.gcsnc.com/mission_possible/September%202007%20Newsletter.pdf

- ¹⁶ Denver Public Schools, Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp). "Salary estimator." [http://denverprocomp.org/stories/storyReader\\$230](http://denverprocomp.org/stories/storyReader$230)
- ¹⁷ Associated Press. "Teachers at 37 low-performing N.C. high schools get bonuses," *The (Raleigh, NC) News & Observer*, September 23, 2005; Buchanan, B. "Low-performing schools still get bonuses," *The (Greensboro, NC) News-Record*, September 24, 2005; Silberman, T. "Bonuses for some teachers disputed; Gains rewarded in failing schools," *The (Raleigh, NC) News & Observer*, September 23, 2005.
- ¹⁸ *Palm Beach Post* staff. "New bonus program for teachers signed," *Palm Beach Post*, March 30, 2007.
- ¹⁹ Radcliffe, J. "Houston tying teacher bonuses to teamwork," *Houston Chronicle*, August 23, 2007; Radcliffe, J. "Houston teachers could opt out of new incentive pay plan," *Houston Chronicle*, August 23, 2007; Houston Independent School District. "New HISD teacher-performance-pay ideas a big improvement." News release, August 23, 2007.
- ²⁰ These stakeholders include the Governor, Superintendent of Education, members of the State Legislature, Palmetto State Teachers Association, South Carolina Education Association, South Carolina Association of School Administrators, parents, teachers, administrators, etc.